

Doing Good Works

As a boy I went to the local village Methodist Church every week. My parents were not religious but I loved everything about God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Ghost. The stories, the parables, the lessons in human morality.

Various stories took root in my mind. The Sower and the Seed, the Widow's Mite, turning the other cheek, the Good Samaritan.

When I was fifteen I found out about Buddhism and I realised that Christianity wasn't the only religion in the world. Then I wanted to know all about all of them. I studied a lot of different things including a lot of visits to the Radha Krishna Temple to chant Hare Krishna with the devotees and to eat prasadam.

When I was not quite twenty-one years of age (in early 1974) I was tricked into joining a pseudo-religious cult where I was hypnotised and brainwashed. For several years I was taught to believe things which would sound completely mad and ridiculous to anyone who wasn't under hypnotic control. We were told, for instance that the cosmic healing forces would cause us to develop a "third eye". At first this was said to be simply an ability to see "auras" but, after some time, people began saying that it would be a real physical third eye. Leo, the leader and founder of the cult, said that the forces which were coming in to this planet would cause our skulls to melt, cause the fontanelles of our skulls to open "like a tulip" and cause our brains to "un-convolute" until they took the form of an Egyptian hat. Then the third eyes would pop.

To anyone outside of the group these statements would sound like a joke or like some mad thing based on H. P. Lovecraft. To those of us who had been placed under deep hypnosis, though, it sounded amazing and marvellous. We looked forward to it and didn't think it was in any way horrific or stupid. I distinctly remember believing every word of it even though it now seems perfectly clear to me that we were all experiencing a form of induced madness. I had never read any Lovecraft so I didn't recognise any of the similarities. We were told that these transformations were to be called "The Head Development" and that they were caused by cosmic healing forces which were coming into the Planet Earth in response to the work we were doing.

This "work" involved studying "The Laws" and doing "The Groundwork". The more we studied The Laws the more we connected ourselves to the source of the universal forces. We attended meetings in church halls which were hired for the night. We sat in semi-circular arrangements of chairs called "A Horseshoe" and we believed that the "force" was of an electro-magnetic nature and would travel through us from person to person in the Horseshoe. The arrangement of chairs was like a horseshoe magnet and we would all be "charged up" by it. There were lots of references to the "Blue Light" of "Orgone Energy" and comparison was made to the "Blue Light" of the British Police Force. It was an open secret that all of these "teachings" we were receiving were talking about matters relating to the police: "Blue Light", "The Laws", "The Force", "Guardians" etc.

Gurdjieff and Ouspensky were mentioned a lot and Wilhelm Reich only very occasionally. Anton Mesmer's concept of "Animal Magnetism" was never mentioned, presumably because it might cause us to realise that we were under hypnosis the whole time. Instead of "Animal Magnetism" the hypnosis was referred to obliquely as "Electrical Atmospheres" and "Different Mind States". They also never mentioned Martin Heidegger, although he must have been an influence at some stage in Leo's thinking, or perhaps was derived second hand via Gurdjieff's ideas. Anyway there was a LOT about eliminating individual personality in favour of an "essence" which would make everyone become the same as each other in their "core values" based on "The Laws".

The group was called "The Emin" and the so-called teachings were derived from such sources as Gurdjieff and Ouspensky along with bits of spiritualism and the study of ancient Egypt. The "Laws" were mostly numerical, based on the idea that two things interacting would have certain knowable qualities of twoness while three things interacting would have certain qualities of threeness, four things would have knowable, understandable qualities of fourness and so on and so forth.

It was partly simplistic numerology augmented by the Law of Octaves and references to mathematical ideas such as throwing the word "vector" in as a hint toward the idea of finding the same patterns repeating at different levels.

The term "fractal" was not then in common usage but the principle of laws or perfect forms which repeat with self-similarity at different levels or octaves was already well known in various philosophies from the ancient Greeks to the Chinese Taoists.

The Emin group sold us papers written by Leo explaining some of his ideas. He said that studying The Laws and finding examples of them would connect us to the source of The Laws and thus allow us to process the healing forces through sympathetic magic.

We did various experiments with "The Force". for example one person would be blindfolded while two people would pose as Egyptian Guardians. The Guardians would project a barrier between them and the blindfolded person would walk forwards and stop when they felt as if they had reached the Force Barrier. Other tricks like this one were performed, each of them possible to do without any "psychic powers" whatsoever, but simply by the use of small sounds, bits of the floor visible through the bottom of the blindfold etc.

In amongst these various "experiments" the group leader (Orman) once threw in an extra one which didn't seem to be related to any psychic ability at all. The exercise involved two people chosen seemingly at random being told to hold hands and jump over an old broom stick, the kind with a bundle of twigs like the classic "witch's broomstick". I was told to hold hands with a girl called "Loane" (an anagram of "alone") and we jumped over the broomstick. We all had special names which we had chosen as a mark of our dedication to "Development". My name at that time was "Zion", which I derived from "Mount Zion" in John Bunyan's book "Pilgrim's Progress". I didn't know (in those days) that the word "Zion" had any significance in Judaism. I thought it was a Christian thing. Anyway, we jumped the broomstick thinking that it was just another psychic experiment of some kind. I was always very puzzled by that exercise and I couldn't see what the purpose of it would be. I asked several people but they merely laughed and told me that I would "find out the purpose later".

I didn't find out the purpose of that broomstick jump until, years later, when I had gotten away from the pseudo-religious cult and "de-programmed" myself from all of the rubbish they had taught us. Then, one day, I heard that there was an Afro-Caribbean tradition of holding hands and jumping over a broomstick as a form of common law marriage. I was stunned. It meant that they had "married" me to that girl when I was only twenty years old and no-one had ever told me! I can only hope that, legally, it doesn't count if no-one tells you what it's supposed to be.

Leo, AKA Raymond Armin, who was the leader of the Emin had managed to trick the women members of the group into accepting a "priestess" role in things. His idea was that the men do the talking to the group and Emin "ladies" (he always called them "ladies", never women) would sit at the back of the hall and silently "process The Force". So, in our hypnotised state we were seeing the priestess role as a great honour because it was supposed to be "higher" than the men. However, in reality, it was just a cynical return to the old misogynistic Victorian idea of women just sitting there and looking pretty while the men took the lead. It was a Stepford Wives scenario.

Also the racial balance of the Emin was wrong. In all the seven years that I was being brainwashed by them I only ever saw two black Emin people. One male, one female (Tokenism). The female black Emin person had chosen the name "Sunny" and her real name outside the Emin was Angela Bruce. She was a television actor. The Emin was trying to attract famous people the way that Scientology and other groups had managed to do. Also we were being brainwashed with homophobia. We were told that homosexuality was "an electrical cancer which infects the human aura". I shamefacedly apologise for being stupid enough to open myself to hypnotism and brainwashing techniques which put those kinds of poisonous ideas into our brains. On the positive side all I can say is that at least they never advocated harming any gay people in any way. All the harm was being done to our stupid gullible minds. They were trying to cure me of being gay when I wasn't even gay in the first place. I didn't know what I was at the time. I was very confused. I eventually came to identify as asexual.

Various events led to me being able to get away from their hypnotic influence. The first event was when one of the leaders of the group made a racist comment about Pakistani people and I attempted to walk out of the meeting in outrage. He caught up with me just outside and said something to me. I don't remember what he said but whatever it was it made go back in to the meeting and sit down with everyone else.

The second event was when Paddy Milligan, wife of Spike Milligan, died of breast cancer in 1978. I had worked with Paddy the previous year when we had been asked to record a "talking book" of Leo's poetry with Paddy reading a poem, then me reading the next poem and so on, alternating between the female voice and the male voice throughout Leo's book which was called "The Project Bluebook Writings". Paddy was known in the group as "Gem". In those days I was known as "Jack". I didn't know that Paddy, "Gem", was suffering from cancer.

Paddy's death shocked me very deeply because I had been led to believe that the "healing forces" of the cult we were in had the ability to heal cancer.

For Paddy to have died from cancer meant that there was something very wrong with the teachings we were receiving. Up until then I couldn't really think that there might be anything

wrong with the group. The thoughts were blocked in my mind. Paddy's death, reported in a newspaper, unblocked the neural pathways and allowed me to think the previously unthinkable.

Another event along the road to breaking out of hypnotic control was when I was told not to do "good works".

I had joined the "Merton Volunteer Bureau", a department of the local council in the area where I lived at Morden in Surrey. I was working in a petrol station as a cashier on shifts. I worked on a nine day shift cycle: three days on a morning shift, three days on an evening shift and then had three days off. This meant that I had spare time during the day to dig gardens for old people and clip their hedges. This fitted in with my philosophy of "doing good works" which I got from Christianity and from Buddhism. It was very important to me. I needed to be doing some good things to help other people instead of just collecting examples of "The Laws" all the time.

The day to day life of Emin people tended to be divided between two identities. We would work in jobs and then go to meetings in the evening. The Emin leaders divided our experience into Emin and Life. People spoke disparagingly of "Life" and "The Culture" as coarse and vulgar. When we went to meetings we were told to leave our "life" outside with our coats. In the meetings we would be known by an Emin Name and there was a dress code. In the early days of my Emin experience, say from 1974 to about 1978, we had to wear tunics of different colours depending on which group we were in and what rank we had attained. In the late 70s that changed and we were told to wear office worker sort of clothes. Men in suits, women in smart dresses.

I worked in factories, warehouses and petrol stations so I had to change out of my working clothes and into a suit before I could go to a meeting. There were a lot of very silly men and women who thought that everyone worked in offices. On several different occasions people said to me "Oh, you look very smart! Have you just come from work?" Then I would explain that I was a petrol pump attendant and that the smart suit was most definitely not my working clothes. I felt indignant that I was surrounded by people whose idea of "work" was sitting on their backsides in a centrally heated office all day from 9 to 5 drinking coffee while proper working class people were on shift work getting our hands dirty doing real work. In those days I was getting less than £70 pounds a week in most of the jobs I did and I was giving the Emin most of that. The only money I kept back was for basic necessities of life and bus fares. So the money I was paying to the Emin was divided into a weekly subscription plus the money for Emin books and papers plus a voluntary (if you can still call it voluntary when you're under hypnosis) donation to the pyramid-shaped box in the foyer of the Emin meeting place at Hotham Road, Putney.

Still I found time to do voluntary work for older people in Morden. I lived at my mum's house in Canterbury Road. I wanted to move out and get a flat but Orman had instructed me to live with my mum. By this stage I was in my late 20s and had been living this hypnotised life for several years and feeling very strange about it, as though my mind was somehow wrapped up in cotton wool.

I had a shock at one house where I was digging the garden. The old man came out of the house and gave me a cup of tea and then began to chat to me about his past. I mentioned that I came from an Irish family.

He admitted that when he was a young man he had been a member of "The Black and Tans". An infamous British paramilitary police force which, in the 1920s, had gained a reputation for extreme violence and the indiscriminate murder of Irish civilians. He looked at me rather sheepishly and said that he didn't think anyone would be coming after him with reprisals after all these years.

What could I do? What could I say? It was like meeting someone from the Nazi SS. He was an old man on his last legs. There was nothing I could do. He had gotten away with it and that was that. I finished digging his garden and said no more about it. The past is the past after so many years. But we don't forget.

One of the Emin leaders called me in for a chat and asked questions about where I worked and how I lived my life when I wasn't at Emin meetings. When I told him about the volunteer work and the doing of good works he was very dismissive of the whole idea and told me that I didn't need to worry about such things because the Emin work would cause all that sort of thing to just happen magically through the effect of "The Force". I was shocked that he came out so explicitly against doing good things to help people.

By this stage I was almost ready to leave the Emin. It was getting to that sort of stage of disillusionment. I had already noticed how different people joining the groups were told different things. I had been told the Emin was a religious group. Other people had been told that the Emin wasn't religious and a third bunch of people had been told that the Emin hadn't been religious before but was now going to be. The last straw was when Leo tried to jump on the bandwagon of the new Punk fashion by using the word "fucking" (and then pausing for dramatic effect) when speaking to a group of young new students. He was obviously trying to get in on the trendy new fashion. I had seldom heard anyone in Emin use a swearword before.

I left. I didn't ever go back, although I did do a protest outside their meeting hall in Putney a few times.

From then onwards I concentrated on doing good works. I protested against South African Apartheid, against foxhunting, against fur coats and animal experiments, I worked for a children's charity, I did volunteer work for Social Services, I became a hunt saboteur, I marched as part of Rock Against Racism, I worked on an animal sanctuary, I did environmental campaigning. All about Doing Good Works in the World or what I sometimes call "Dharma Mitzvah".